

Puerto Vallarta

Patricia and I went to Puerto Vallarta for a week's vacation before the trial was to start. We stayed in a tropical hotel on the beach. But it rained, a cold rain, every day, I got a sore throat, and day after day I stayed in bed, reading. We couldn't extend our stay, not that we were very tempted to, because we were due to be in Los Angeles on a Monday for the start of the trial. If I were a day late I forfeited \$50,000 bail.

On Saturday morning, the day before we were scheduled to leave, the sun was shining for the first time and magically, my throat wasn't sore. We had a day after all we could spend on the beach. There were only a few people on the sand in front of the hotel but we wanted to get off by ourselves and to explore a little on our one day of real vacation with the sun shining.

We got some sandwiches and fruit from the hotel, went out to the beach and started walking south along the ocean. We were wearing only our bathing suits and sandals, and we had a couple of bath towels, a bottle of water and some suntan lotion. I had a paperback of a play, The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail. But it wasn't a day for reading.

The sun was already hot as we walked along. There didn't seem to be any other hotels or houses south of ours. The beach was very narrow, a strip of white sand that kept the jungle from pushing into the sea. The water was transparent as it spread over the sand, light blue and clear a few

feet out.

The beachfront was broken into a series of coves. It was hard to decide which was prettiest, when to stop. We would push through some bushes and ferns at the edge of a scallop of sand and see another, palm trees leaning over it, waves coming in.

We kept going for half an hour without running into another person. It was like having an island to ourselves, as we'd had at Pattaya. The sky was blue with a few white clouds, the sunlight was very bright on the beach, but it was shady under palmtrees just a few yards from the water and further in it was actually dark, with brightcolored birds flying from tree to tree and calling out loudly.

Finally we found a pocket of sand that was the right place. It was at an angle from the ocean so that waves piled up along a spit and drove for a distance into the beach. That was what I'd been looking for, waves I could ride. There was no one else around, so after a couple of rides I took off my trunks and went back in the water, in the sunlight, naked. The waves were very good, there was a strong surge that heaved you along then crested at the beach, dropped you down and receded with a rush along your body leaving you on the wet sand. The water was cool. It was perfect.

After a long while, after one more wave that had picked me up after another had dropped me and slid me almost into the shade, I got up and joined Patricia on a towel under the palmtrees. She had taken her suit off too. We lay together side by side on our backs, holding hands, till the rhythm of the waves had died away in my shoulders and head. Then we sat up and ate our sandwiches and fruit,

looking at the sea.

I lay back again on the towel, which was resting on palmleaves, and Patricia put her head on my chest. I stroked her head. After a while she moved down and began to make love to me. I had my hands underneath my head, which was tilted back so that I was looking up into the jungle, which seemed to be part of me, I was part of it, there was no difference although there were many parts of us, green, dark, brilliant. I closed my eyes.

When they opened for a moment I saw a green parrot, actually a parrot, with a scarlet crest gliding slowly under the forest canopy from one part to another. My eyes closed again and I felt the jungle and Patricia. I had been reading Hegel for the first time the day before in the rain and the thought came into my mind as I lay, "This, this is non-alienation."

As I thought that, the light behind my lids became much darker suddenly as though the sun had gone behind a cloud. It was strange because we were already in the shade. I opened my eyes. A dark man in a cowboy hat and a canvas shirt and shorts was standing a few feet away between us and the bright sand and sunlight, pointing a large pistol at me. Another man also wearing shorts and a canvas shirt and with a revolver in a side holster was standing a little further off.

They were both wearing tennis shoes and they had come up so quietly that Patricia hadn't noticed them yet. I nudged her head and she sat up and saw the man with the gun pointed at us. Neither of us had anything on. We didn't have anything to steal but they didn't know that.

The man was speaking Spanish, which I didn't understand. With his other hand he pulled out a leather wallet and flipped it open to show an official-looking photograph of himself and a badge. Evidently he was some sort of policeman. He looked at Patricia then at me and shook his head saying, "Malo, malo." I didn't know what that meant but the way he said it, it had a bad ring. I had a feeling what he was referring to. He gestured for us to put something on, still with the gun out. Apparently we were under arrest.

Patricia's suit was lying next to her and she got it on quickly, but mine was somewhere over on the beach. I got up naked and went looking for it. When I found it, it was wet and tangled and hard to get into. I put one foot in but I couldn't get the other foot through right away and I was hopping around for a moment in a little dance, while the policemen watched. It was boxer-type and after I got it on I tried to zip up the fly, but wet sand had gotten into the zipper and it wouldn't close. I tugged at it, shifting hands and moving my weight from one foot to the other in another dance, but no luck. It was stuck. I was almost ready to give up on it and just wear a towel around me. but I went in the water and washed the sand out and managed to get zipped up.

The policeman had put away his badge and his large pistol, but he did not have a friendly look. Patricia had gathered up the towels and the remains of our lunch. He was speaking Spanish to us, and I said "no comprende," which went without saying but it was all I knew. I shrugged and opened my hands to show that we had no wallets or identification.

He gestured for us to come with him and we followed him through the jungle with the other man walking behind us. It got hotter as we got farther from the ocean. There wasn't much of a path, and we were brushing through ferns and banana leaves in our bathing suits. Finally we came out onto a road, and we started walking in the direction of the hotel.

It was a beautiful day with bushes of gorgeous tropical flowers lining the road, but Patricia and I were glum as we walked along. I tried to push out of my mind the thought that we could miss the flight out the next day and the opening of the trial the day after that. And the reasons for it, the stories for the press.

Eventually we walked by the sign for our hotel and the driveway that led to it. I assumed the police would want us to get our passports and our wallets, and maybe some clothes, and I tried to say this to the man in front but he walked on as if he hadn't heard. He didn't speak English, but this didn't seem so hard to understand. I shrugged, gave the man behind a reassuring wave meaning he should wait a minute, and started down the driveway. Just as I turned his hand was on my wrist and his pistol was out. He shook his head no with a very dark look and yanked me along. It was a discouraging moment as the hotel, with all our identification and clothes and travellers' checks inside with our luggage, disappeared behind us at a bend in the road.

A truck came along and the man ahead of us waved it down with his pistol, which he used as a badge. We got in back and drove the rest of the way into the town of Puerto Vallarta, to the police station, where they booked us in and locked us in a small cell. Our bathing suits were dry by now, and

we sat on our towels on an iron bench, not saying a lot to each other. We held hands.

Our two policemen were talking to someone in a room nearby, apparently reporting. Finally another policeman opened the bars of our cell and motioned me out. He took me to a room nearby where I had heard the talking. A man was sitting behind a desk reading some handwritten notes. He had a sober expression when he looked up, but he didn't seem too unfriendly. He was the police chief of Puerto Vallarta and he turned out to speak good English. He was wearing dark slacks and a sportshirt and I felt at some disadvantage standing in front of his desk in my bathing suit, aside from the fact that I was under arrest in a Mexican jail.

He pointed to the notes and said, "You know what the charges are against you?"

I said, "Yes, we weren't wearing any clothes on the beach. I'm sorry."

He shook his head and said, "Oh, no, my men say that it was very much worse than that." I heard the word "malo" again, either he said it or it was inside my head.

But that was all I was going to cop to. I said again, "I'm sorry, we shouldn't have taken our suits off. We didn't think there was anyone else around. I admit we did that, and we should not have." I tried to indicate by a firm tone that that was as much as I was going to admit.

He sighed, and said that he would have to bring the charges his men had attested to, which

were more serious. We could either plead guilty and pay a fine, or if we chose, we could face trial, in which case we would have to wait in Puerto Vallarta for a court date.

I asked how long that would be take. "A month. Maybe less."

That was not too feasible. But neither was pleading guilty to the charges I suspected he was talking about. It was a choice between losing \$50,000 bond--delaying the start of my trial in Los Angeles and probably being found guilty here anyway, maybe facing jail time--or starting my federal felony trial in LA on time, two days after pleading guilty to sexual offenses in Mexico.

I went back to the cell and talked with Patricia. We had only one choice really, we couldn't wait here if we had a chance to leave, but I went back to the chief and told him that we would be willing to admit that we had been naked on the beach and pay the fine for that. Otherwise we would have to go to court.

After thinking it over for a bit, he decided to let us off with a single charge of committing a public nuisance, or some such offense, with a fine of \$100 each. He was letting us off easy. Patricia was to go back to the hotel with one of the policemen to get our passports and money for the fine while I stayed in the jail.

The chief of police had commented on the fact that I had listed my profession as "writer" in the booking process. He seemed interested in it. I thought maybe that was why he had let us off lightly, so

I told Patricia to bring back a copy of my book to show him. I wasn't used to that self-description myself, and I didn't assume that people took it seriously.

He let me sit in his office to wait for Patricia rather than go back to the cell, and I started reading the book I had brought, The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail. He looked up from his paperwork, noticed the title and asked me what it was about. We were, after all, sitting in a jail. But as I started to answer, I realized that the subject was even closer to home for him, in Mexico.

I said, "Well, it's a play about...as a matter of fact, it has to do with what we call in the U.S. the "Mexican war." Our war against Mexico, when we took a lot of your territory. It was quite a bit like Vietnam, in fact. Thoreau was a writer who refused to pay his poll tax as a protest against what we were doing in Mexico, and he was put in jail. Like our draft resisters today."

He said, "Ah, Vietnam. It's crazy, what you North Americans are doing in Vietnam!"

I sat up, and put the book down. He went on, lifting his arms from the desk in amazement, "I will never, never be able to understand how you could have gotten yourselves involved in Vietnam after the French had been defeated! Can you explain that to me?"

I said, "That's a very good question. It's not easy to explain at all. I've been doing my best to understand it for years. That happens to be what my book is about, a large part of it."

I spent the next hour till Patricia got back telling him what I thought I had learned about this, things I had put into Papers on the War. He listened closely, asked questions, nodded, and made some comparisons of his own to US relations with Mexico and the Third World. We were in the midst of this when Patricia returned with some pants and a shirt for me, passports and travellers checks, and my book. I had decided to give it to him.

I put my clothes on over my bathing suit, signed four \$50 travellers checks and signed the copy of my book. I handed him the checks along with the book, which I told him I was sure he would be interested in. He thanked me and we shook hands. Patricia and I got a taxi back to the hotel and I told her about our discussion while she was away. We had a nice last evening at the hotel, which seemed noticeably romantic after the jail cell and that long day.

The next morning with our bags packed we were having breakfast and waiting for the car to take us to the airport when the hotel clerk told me that I had a call from the police. I was a little nervous as I went to the phone. It was the police chief.

He said, "You know, I was up most of the night reading your book. It's extremely interesting. I have learned a great deal from it. But by coincidence, one of my men had an old copy of Playboy at the jail and it had an article about you in it. We've all read it. We're very impressed by the stand you are taking. We talked about what we could do to support what you are doing. And we've decided that we would like to make a contribution to your trial."

He asked if I would have time to come by the jail on our way to the airport, and I told him that

I certainly would, for that. Our taxi arrived as we were talking, and I told Patricia the news as we loaded the bags in. The taxi waited while we went into the jailhouse to see the chief and his men. All the police came in to shake hands, and they asked me to sign their copy of the Joe McGinnis article in Playboy.

The chief handed me an envelope that they had all signed. Inside were the four \$50 travellers checks I had given him the day before. The chief was a little apologetic as I looked inside. He said, "It's not very much. And in a certain sense it's your own money..."

I said, "No, no, no, don't say that, it's a real contribution and we're very grateful for it. It will go to our trial, and it's really needed." I said it was wonderful to have their support. That was true. It felt like a good start for the trial. We all embraced.

An hour later we were flying to LA, and that evening we had dinner with Stan Sheinbaum, who was among other things in charge of our fund-raising. He was also one of the few people we could tell this story to. We told him and gave him the checks. He was glad to get them. He was especially glad that we would be in court on time the next day and that he wouldn't have to find \$50,000 to make bond, or to explain why.